WONDERFUL WONDERFUL WOMEN Celebrating some of

MARCH 2018 ISSUE 251

GYPSY QUEEN

the Midlands' most influential women

Rob Ward talks about his gay boxing play

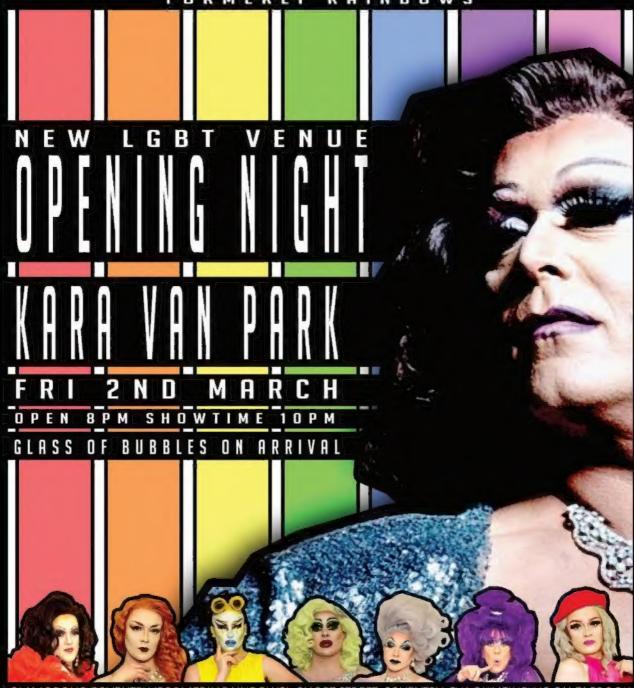
Paloma Faith

The double platinum singer chats to Zone ahead of her Midlands tour dates

VIRAL SCENE GADGETS WHAT'S ON COMPETITIONS

GLAMOROUS

COVENTRY FORMERLY RAINBOWS



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Paloma Faith 10 Zone talks to the double platinum-selling artist ahead of her UK tour



Do we still need a gay scene? 56

We ask you whether gay venues are still relevant in 2018.

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Burberry launch LGBT-inspired check fabric

Fashion house Burberry have unveiled a rainbow check fabric in support of the LGBT community.

The new design comes as part of Christopher Bailey's final collection in his role as the company's president and creative director.

Bailey said: "My final collection is dedicated to, and in support of, some of the best and brightest organisations supporting LGBTQ+ youth around the world. There has never been a more important time to say that in our diversity lies our strength and our creativity."

Burberry have announced that donations to three charities will be made from sales of the check collection.

Money will go to the LGBT Youth homeless charity Albert Kennedy Trust, based here in the UK, and the youth suicide hotline Trevor Project, based in the US.

Donations will also be made to the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA).

Burberry said it would be donating the funds to 'broaden the awareness, mentoring and resources available to LGBTQ communities around the world'.



Have ya heard?



Brum gay venue to open club in Coventry

Bosses of Birmingham gay venue Glamorous are this month opening a new LGBT club in Coventry, on the site of recently closed gay venue

Building on the success of their central Birmingham venue under the same Glamorous brand name, Matthew Eason and Sam Hibbert are looking forward to welcoming revellers to the Coventry club's opening night on Friday

2 March, at 8pm, complete with special guest Kara Van-Park.

Glamorous Coventry will open seven nights a week and is currently licensed until 6am every day. The venue has undergone a facelift in preparation for its opening event, with a staging area having been added on the downstairs

Matthew and Sam are intending to make further investment at a later stage, bringing the venue even more up to date while at the same time retaining the essence of the club that Coventry's gay community has known and loved.

"The venue's been open for several years under a different name," says Sam, "and Matthew and myself are proud to give it a fresh one for 2018. We're giving it everything it possibly needs to ensure that it stands the test of time and is still here in decades to come."

Further information can be found on Glamorous Coventry's facebook page.

Rufus Wainwright announces UK tour

Gay singer Rufus Wainwright has announced that he will be stopping off in the Midlands as part of his new UK tour later this year. The Grammy-nominated artist will play Coventry Cathedral on Friday 22 June and the Royal Concert Hall in Nottingham the following day. Tickets for the intimate gigs are now available to buy at rufuswainwright.com.



Midlands man in running for **Mr Leather UK** title



A gay man from the Midlands is looking to become Mr Leather UK this month.

Birmingham's Mike Catterall is one of five candidates for the 2018 title, and also runs a monthly leather social event at the city's award-winning Eden Bar.

If Mike is crowned the winner, he will be asked to become a goodwill ambassador, fundraiser and leathermen role model. He will also be the first ever deaf Mr Leather UK.

The final of the competition takes place on Friday 16 March at Bloc, South Vauxhall, London. All the best, Mike!

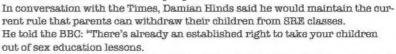
Education Secretary scraps plans on LGBT sex education

The government's new Education Secretary is scrapping plans for compulsory sex and relationship education in all schools, after receiving pressure from faith groups.

Pink News reports that Damian Hinds, who became Secretary of State for Education last month, taking the post from minister Justine Greening who had launched a review of government guidance on sex and relationship education (SRE).

Greening had backed plans for compulsory, LGBT-inclusive SRE to be taught at all schools, but last month, Mr Hinds said he would champion the right of parents to with-

draw their kids from lessons they object to.



"What we're doing is bringing in relationships education in primary school and relationship and sex education in secondary schools.

"Those lessons will be in all schools... it will be compulsory to have them in all schools, but as I say there's an established right which will continue for parents to be able to withdraw their children from the sex education bits of relationships and sex education.

"That right exists and will continue."

It comes after faith groups urged him to adopt new rules that block kids from learning about LGBT issues without permission from their parents, and that permit schools to teach being gay is sinful and damaging.

Former Education Secretary Nicky Morgan had backed reforms in 2016 - but progress was delayed by the Brexit vote and change of Prime Minister.



Brum international dance festival to return in the summer



The hugely popular Birmingham International Dance Festival (BIDF) makes a welcome return from 1 to 24 June.

Produced by the Birmingham Hippodrome-based DanceX-change, the event will feature 'fantastic dance in the city's theatres and a takeover of Birmingham's streets and squares, with show-stopping free performances and opportunities to get dancing'. The programme, inspired and curated around themes

of imagination and digital art, will present work that shows choreographic practice at its best, pushing the boundaries of dance as a contemporary art form. Alongside the performance programme will be a series of professional and industry events, debates and workshops - creating a valuable space for dialogue, collaboration, the sharing of ideas and the development of skills... To find out more about the festival, visit bidf.co.uk

'Ultimate'

launched

Lesbian self-help author Mallory Muffman has launched a new book for gay women.

The Ultimate Lesbian Guide To Getting Over Your Ex is the first in a series of titles, and provides a deeper understanding of the processes and struggles experienced during and after a lesbian breakup.

Muffman says the conventions of lesbian relationships are 'unique, and differ from any other form of partnership', and that her book provides 'specific and tailored' guidance on the healing process.

"It's my firm belief that one of the greatest challenges of separating with a romantic partner is the loss of a part of ourselves," says Muffman. "Each relationship calls forth a different combination of our characteristics, and we become accustomed to seeing ourselves through the gaze of our

romantic partner. It can often be the struggle with a lost sense of self that leads to a difficulty in moving past the breakup."

The new book is available in both Kindle and paperback forms and is now on sale at amazon.co.uk from as little as £2.17.



self-help book Have ya heard? Birmingham Gay Symphony Orchestra

to hold spring concert



Birmingham Gay Symphony Orchestra (BGSO) will perform their annual spring concert this month.

The award-winning orchestra's Escape To The Country presentation will 'take a stroll through the countryside' with music by Beethoven, Vaughan Williams and MacCunn.

Now in their second season as the resident orchestra at St Paul's in the Jewellery Quarter, BGSO will be performing a selection of well-known tunes alongside the classical music pieces.

The orchestra make their debut at Symphony Hall in November, and celebrate their 10th anniversary next year.

Kat Galbraith, BGSO Leader, said: "We love to make our audiences smile, so we've chosen some really joyful music for this concert - and we've kept a few surprises up our sleeves too!"

Escape To The Country is performed at St Paul's in the Jewellery Quarter on Saturday 17 March at 3pm. Tickets are available at bgso.org.uk.

David Tennant to walk red carpet for Birmingham premiere of You, Me & Him



David Tennant will be joined on the Cineworld Birmingham red carpet (on Saturday 31 March) by a host of fellow celebrities for the charity premiere of the movie, You, Me And Him.

A comedy-drama about a lesbian couple at different points in their lives, the film stars Tennant alongside Sally Phillips and Faye

Tennant and Phillips are both Ambassadors for the charity Baby Lifeline's &5million Monitoring For Mums appeal. The initiative aims to provide maternity and neonatal equipment for maternity services nationally. The Birmingham film premiere will raise funds for the appeal...

To find out more about the movie itself, check out the Arts & Culture section of this issue of Zone magazine.

Local Life Story

Name: Lu Skerratt

Occupation: Sexual Health Outreach Work for LBQ+ women at Birmingham LGBT

Place of birth: London

Star sign: Leo

Age: 23

About Lu

Where did you grow up?

A small market town called Saffron Walden in Essex although it likes to pretend it's actually part of Cambridgeshire!

Single or attached?

Single.

What makes you happy?

Sausage dogs.

What makes you sad?

A lack of sausage dogs.

What makes you angry?

A badly made brew.

If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

My tiny head. My cousin likes to call it my 'walnut'.

What's been the most embarrassing thing you've done in your life? There are SO many. I'm ridiculously clumsy! I'd say accidentally setting my hair on fire in a very serious church service when I was 11 was probably a pretty low moment.

Would you consider getting married in the future?

I don't actually agree with the institution of marriage in itself, so I guess not.

Coming Out

When did you first know you were gay?

I didn't have a 'lightbulb' moment as such, but I'd say I probably knew when I was about 12.

When did you come out?

I was actually outed at school, so coming out wasn't something I chose to do when I felt ready. But then I guess we LGBTQ* people come out all the time. I last came out this morning.

What was school like for you as a gay teenager?

It was pretty awful for a long time. I was bullied, and the school still worked under the premise of section 28 up until I left. However, I had a couple of amazing members of staff who did all they could and gave me the confidence to stand up and fight for my rights. I remember in sixth form standing on a chair in protest as they weren't teaching us LGBTQ+ inclusive sex education. Luckily things at the school have changed now - I imagine in part due to my constant campaigning! - and they even have a Pride day, something that would've been unimaginable a few years ago.



Who was the first person you told you were gay, and what was their reaction?

I told the school counsellor, Beth. I don't remember her reaction exactly, but I remember feeling so supported, cared for and, in that moment, safe. She was always there for me throughout my time at school - and beyond - and I will always be indebted to her, not least because of how she taught me to find strength through adversity.

What would you say to a youngster trying to come to terms with their own sexuality?

I'd tell them that it's okay. I know it sounds basic, and possibly even a bit lame, but there's nothing more powerful than affirming someone for who they are, and telling them it will be alright. I've worked with some really vulnerable people who've been coming to terms with their sexuality/gender identity, and it's all about fostering and embodying hope; telling them that who they are will always be more than good enough.

Have you ever had any experiences with the opposite sex?

Pass.

Quickfire

Who's your favourite actor? Cate Blanchett.

What's your favourite book?

Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit by Jeanette Winterson. Half empty or half full?

Always full

What's your favourite food?

A proper roast (with a Yorkshire pudding the size of my face!).

And how about your favourite drink? Rum and ginger!

Madonna or Lady Gaga?

Is that even a question?! Madonna!

If you could take a selfie with one person, alive or dead, who would it be?

Marsha P Johnson. I'm in such awe of her resistance and acts of civil disobedience, which started the Stonewall Riots.

Your Career

When you were younger, what did you want to be?

I wanted to be an archeologist for a really long time, then a vicar, then a human rights lawyer. I guess in some way I've been able to adapt aspects of these into my life now...although the archeologist aspect is a bit tenuous - I don't think re-watching Indiana Jones counts, does it?!

What was your first job when you left school?

It's actually this job here at Birmingham LGBT. I went to uni as soon as I turned 18, then moved to London to do an MA, and then started a PhD (which I never finished) before coming here.

What's your role at Birmingham

I'm the sexual health outreach worker for lesbian, bisexual & queer-identifying women.

What are the challenges in your job?

Probably getting LBQ+ women to talk about safer sex. Safe sex for me doesn't just mean all the paraphernalia, it's also about the psychological, physical and mental stuff that goes alongside it. Also, for many reasons, the LBQ+ women's scene is always a bit more underground, so it can be trickier to speak to women and to let them know I'm here.

What are the highlights?

I love doing outreach work and getting to know the local community, which this job is perfect for! It's also incredible to be working in a dedicated LGBT centre where you're seen and supported just for who you are.

How does your role help the local LGBT community?

So often LBQ+ women are ignored in the conversation about sexual health and wellbeing. When misogyny, homophobia, transphobia and racism are all in the melting

pot together, queer women are all too often silenced and discriminated against. They suffer abuse and violence which is all perpetuated under

the male gaze. It's really important to have a dedicated service and an out-reach worker/advisor (me) to offer LBQ+ women the opportunity to talk about their sexual health and wellbeing in a safe and non-judgmental environment.

Where do you see yourself in five years' time?

Hopefully still working in this field, I love working with people who are so often silenged from the conversation.

Gay Scene

How long have you been frequenting the Midlands gay scene?

I actually live in Sheffield, so I don't really frequent the Midlands gay scene in the same way.

What's been your fondest memory of the scene?

I've been a big fan of drag for years.

My aunt used to sneak me into
cabaret and drag bars in London
when I was underage. It's such an
amazing escape, both from the world
around you and the toxicity of binary
gender, so my fondest memories are
all tied up with that!

Who's your favourite cabaret act on the scene?

Jinkx Monsoon. Whenever she comes to the UK, I always see her. I even have a tattoo of her!

Who's your favourite person on the scene?

There are too many to count, but I LOVE Virgin Xtravaganzah.

What do you most enjoy about the scene?

When it's truly diverse.

What have you noticed about the way the scene's changed over the years?

I don't think I'm old enough to comment on this one, but some of the places I used to sneak off to as a teenager have closed down due to high rents/gentrification, which really upsets me.



How would you change the scene?

It would be nice if there were more places to go during the day and in the evening. I'd love to see more representation of LBQ+ women, more decent cafes and definitely an LGBTQ+ bookshop!

Time Out

Where do you like to go on a night out?

Probably the theatre or cinema.

What do you do to relax?

I love to go on long walks out into the Peak District with my housemates and Lennie the sausage dog. But when indoors, I read, binge-watch whatever I can and listen to podcasts. I also play rugby and go to a really liberal, inclusive church, which I find is a nice oasis of calm from the outside world.

What do you enjoy on telly?

All sorts. I love Transparent, and have just got into One Mississippi. I'm also quite partial to Star Trek, which excitingly enough is an anagram of my surname. Other than that, any Louis Theroux or David Attenborough documentary gets my heart pounding.

What was the last track or album you bought or downloaded?

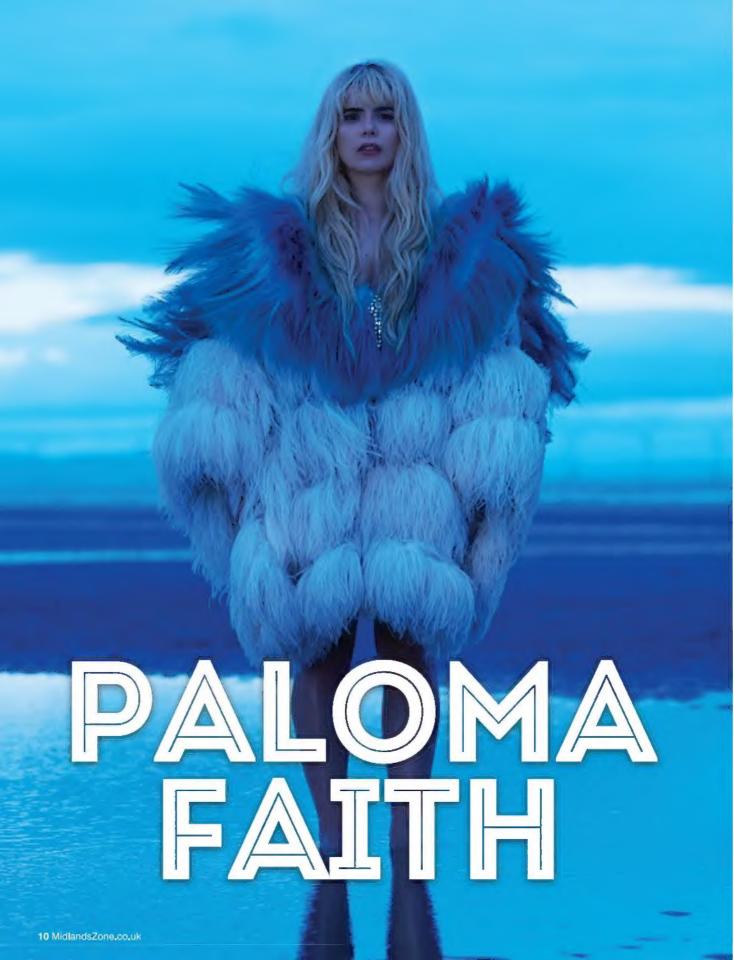
Rhiannon Scutt's latest EP. Not only is she one of my closest friends, she's also a bit of a queer icon!

Which one website do you spend the most time on?

I could pretend it's the Guardian, but in reality it's probably Buzzfeed.

What type of holiday do you prefer?

One where I don't have to sit still!



Bursting onto the scene back in 2009 with Do You Want The Truth Or Something Beautiful?, Paloma Faith is on course to become the first British female artist to have four consecutive double platinum albums.

Lauren Foster caught up with the London-born singer ahead of her show at Birmingham's Genting Arena this month...

You're bringing The Architect tour to Birmingham's Genting Arena this month. What can audiences expect from your show?

I think that I'm going to try and do something a little bit more forward looking and modern this time round - I like to reinvent all the time I've been embedded in the world of nostalgia for a while, and now I feel like it's time, socially and politically, to look forward because I think we're in a moment in time where we absolutely must make some positive changes. I'll be singing a mix of old and new songs.

Your new album, also titled The Architect, is currently on course to become your fourth double platinum album in a row - a chart-history record for a British woman. How does that make you feel?

Well, thank god Adele takes her time, is all I can say. I think it's amazing, I have to pinch myself.

What's your favourite song off the new album?

I have lots of favourites for different reasons. I think the overall favourite for me is The Architect because it summarises the whole gist of what I was feeling when writing the record, It's the world singing to humanity. There's a mothering theme to it because it's mother nature and that feels appropriate. I think all of the things I've discussed on the record, like people in power, homelessness, loneliness, poverty, the refugee crisis and Brexit, fall under the umbrella of that song, which is basically that we've messed up massively in the world and we need to start reversing it. I spoke to an environmentalist, and he said if we stopped all anti-theworld activity, like using power

sources that weren't natural and driving cars and taking flights and switching on lights, it would only take five years for the world to completely rejuvenate itself. It's insane.

"I like the little boutique festivals that you don't really know, you usually you get a nice community feel"

You've recently announced that your summer tour includes Forest Live dates. Are you looking forward to them?

I've done stuff in the forest before, and I'm a bit of an old friend to them. I really enjoy it; it's a very beautiful environment, the atmosphere is great and people seem very calm and relaxed. They usually spend quite a bit of time there, having a picnic and stuff. It's really nice. Hopefully we'll have good weather this year.

You're playing multiple festivals this summer, including a headline slot at Splendour Festival. Did you ever imagine you'd be headlining festivals

when you first started out?

When I first started, I thought I'd just do one album to say I've done it, and then I'd probably get dropped. But now here I am, nearly 10 years on!

You've got a busy few months ahead. Do you like being busy? What do you always make time for despite the heavy workload?

I love being busy; I thrive on it, I think. I always prioritise sleep. I'd rather not go out and instead have a good night's sleep because I actually think it's my favourite thing to do. I sometimes spend half of my day looking forward to going to bed. I've got a really nice bed, though.

Do you prefer performing in arenas or at festivals?

There's a massive difference, but I like them for different reasons - I'd never want to give up one of them. I like playing small and big and would always want to. I'm not as popular in certain territories in the world, but I quite enjoy that because I get to do shows that are in small venues, trying to convince people to listen. I still really enjoy doing that. I think it's really good for me as an artist and as a performer to be able to do both.

Do you have a favourite festival?

I really enjoy Bestival and Latitude. I also like the little boutique festivals that you don't really know, because usually you get a nice community feel.

You've branched into television and film. Would you consider taking on more acting roles in the future, and what would be your criteria?

I would absolutely like to do more acting, but I don't think I'm very good at it. I'd want to do art house/indie films, like the British



version of Precious or something like that.

How's parenthood treating you?

It's the best and the worst thing that's ever happened to me. Once you get past six months, it becomes the best thing, but I feel before that it's like hell. You have to provide for this person who doesn't even care if you exist or not.

What was behind the decision to keep the sex of your child private?

It's just about keeping a few details about my child out of the public eye. I don't think celebrity culture is a healthy environment for children, I think when they're 18, they can make a decision for themselves.

You have an impeccable sense of style. Who's your favourite designer?

At the moment it's Alessandro Michele, who designs for Gucci, but

"I'm not sure he wants to be friends with me because they don't lend me any clothes."

I'm not sure he wants to be friends with me because they don't lend me any clothes. I've always been into style more than fashion, I guess.

Tell us something about yourself that we probably won't already know or that isn't well documented. I feel like I overshare. I'm not actually that mad; I'm very measured - and quite sensible, perhaps. I love travel. I particularly like the south of Italy, and I've been to Thailand and the Maldives and Mexico and Cuba, and I had amazing times there. I really like Japan, even though there are lots of people.

What does the future hold for Paloma Faith?

Hopefully lots more touring and a good work/home balance. That's really important now. And hopefully starting a new album and breaking some more self imposed records

Paloma Faith plays Genting Arena, Birmingham, on Wednesday 21 March and Cannock Chase Forest, Staffordshire, on Friday 29 June

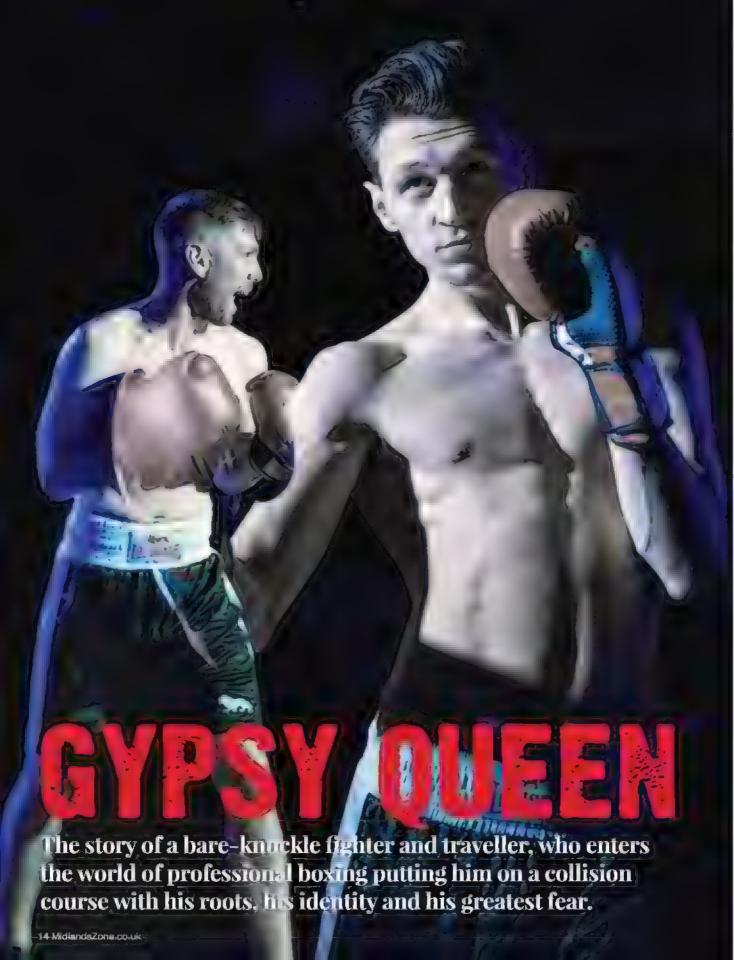
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Writer and actor Rob Ward brings his own piece of LGBT theatre to Birmingham's Old Joint Stock Theatre this April with Gypsy Queen, a powerful piece that explores homosexuality, masculinity and traveller culture. Here, he talks to Midlands Zone...

Can you explain the inspiration behind the story of Gypsy Queen?

About five years ago, I co-wrote a one-man show about homophobia in football. Growing up as a big sports fan, being born into a sporty family and being gay, it was quite hard to make those two things co-exist. There was a lack of openly gay sports people out there, and I think it's always important to have role models from all walks of life and a range of LGBT people to relate to

About four years ago, Russia was hosting the Winter Olympics, and myself and a group of LGBT writers in Manchester got together. At the time, Russia passed some anti-LGBT legislation similar to when we had Section 28 in this country.

On the opening weekend of the Winter Olympics, we got together and did this performance/protest piece to raise some money for a Russian LGBT charity. I wrote a short play about two boxers - it was only a 16-minute piece, but the idea stuck around and I tried to expand it to a one-act 70-minute piece.

It was some time around November 2016, and Tyson Fury had been nominated for BBC Sports Personality of the Year. It also came out at the same time that during an interview, he'd made a number of homophobic slurs. It caused a massive stink and a petition began online to get him disqualified from the Sports Personality shortlist. So I started thinking about that. And then, of course, the idea came to mer "What if one of the boxers from the play was a traveller?" It would add a new world and extra stuff to the story

Does any of the story come from personal experience?

Certainly in terms of the sporting world, the lads at the gym. I'm one of four boys who went to an all-boys comprehensive school on Merseyside, and I played football every Sunday. So I'm used to that world. And as I'm gay and was growing up in it, I used it to reconcile that period of my life It certainly went some way towards inspiring me to write Gypsy Queen.

What sort of research did you do for the character of the traveller?

It was research online mainly It's a

difficult topic to broach with the travelling community. In and around Manchester, we've got a couple of traveller communities, and the Gorgeous George character is from one of those communities. There are plenty of documentaries out there that I watched to get inspiration. One in particular was about

"There was a lack of openly gay sports people out there, I think it's always vimportant to have those role models"

the tradition of bare-knuckie fighting, and it suits the story of the play I'm always reading books about traveller culture, and I've learned a lot of interesting things about that culture. It's always interesting to explore a new world when you're writing something. You fundamentally create a character who relates to that world and you get a sense of their background, whether he's a traveller or not. Once you've done the research and you feel like you're not portraying the community in a poor light, you've got to create this three-dimensional character that the audience will want to go on a journey with.

During your research, were there any findings that surprised you?

Yeah, I think what surprised me - and this was whilst we were on tour - was that we met an openly gay traveller. There's a stereotypical image of the travelling community. It was interesting to read that there are movements in that community that are liberal, open to other cultures, to being gay And there are people from that community who're leading by going to the non-travelling world, It seems more fluid than I'd at first imagined it to be; I'd thought it was a community that completely separated itself from the rest of the world. So when I met this guy, he said how he hated shows like Big Fat Gypsy Wedding and the light they portray travellers in. Of course, there are travelling men who're like that, but with every community, there are also men who aren't like that. He would tell me stories of how, when he was younger, there were men in families who didn't want to box but just wanted to sit and read. I think that just reinforced for me how we have this thing in society where one impression is stamped on a community It's very difficult to see past that label, especially if it's a negative

Obviously the traveller men are portrayed as dominant, macho males. How does the play deal with that?

The strongest character in the play is George's mum, Her husband has passed away, and the strength of her in that maledominated community, to raise her kids, to keep a sense of family and sense of spirit, shows that it's not just the men who can be dominant. This play looks at the question of masculinity and what it means to be a man, We have some strong characters in the play; one is an Irish traveller woman, another is a quiet flamboyant and a camp bit on the side for another of the main characters. What I wanted to show was that you have a very camp gay man and a middle-aged woman, yet in what's quite a masculine play, I wanted to show the strength of these characters in particular. I think that made for a nice counterbalance to the masculine world of boxing.

How candid is the production?

It's 15-plus, if that's what you mean! I like to write truthfully for people, from certain worlds. The men in this play can certainly speak quite honestly and openly about what they feel, I wanted to create that authentic sense of who these northern men were. I think the play isn't afraid to tackle a few subjects: homophobia in sport, the influence of religion on sexuality. There's definitely a few characters in there that don't hold their tongue, let's put it that way.

When you were casting the play, was there a criteria?

For me, the only thing I wanted to have was someone who was physically different to me. It's a two-hander. During the play, two people have to create eight characters because it's a multi-role show, Actually, with the tour this year, we've re-cast the role. Ryan Clayton played the part last year, but he's now gone into Coronation. Street, so the new actor is John Askew I was looking for someone athleticlooking - it didn't have to be a big old beefy guy. That's the joy of the different weight classes for boxing. They needed to be a good actor who I could get along with, I had to ask myself if this was the person I'd want to share the journey with, especially with the play I'd written myself, With the show having plenty of comedy in there, I had to get an actor who could stand there and convince me that he was a hard northern boxer with a quick sense of humour, and then be convincing playing a fortysomething Irish traveller mother

You've received some great reviews for the show, and even some nominations. Were you expecting that?

I don't think you can ever expect that. When you set off on the journey, get the script and head into rehearsals, the other actor is the only person who sees it. You've got to believe in it at that stage. You use your best professional judgement to think, "Yeah, we're onto something good here" - but until you get it in front of a live audience, you never really know. The first show was in September 2016, and it's a very different show to then Over that time you learn different things from

different audiences, so you tweak it and add things.

Gypsy Queen shows at Birmingham's Old Joint Stock Theatre from Wednesday 18 to Saturday 21 April.

Visit oldjointstock.co.uk to book tickets.

"It's difficult to see past that label and shackle placed upon them."



"Heart-breaking, raw and emotional, this really is not one to miss"

*** Broadway Baby

"Laugh-out-loud lines... a touching romance"

*** The Independent

From the co-writer of the award winning Away From Home

> Can two men raised to fight ever learn to love?

gypsy queen

By Rob Ward

A Hope Theatre Company production

Directed by Adam Zane

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MYTH BUSTERS

Gender identity and sexuality

Being gay is a choice! There are only two genders! Trans people are gay! Are such statements fact or fiction? We asked the fabulous team at Gaylife Stoke to debunk some common gender identity and sexuality myths, and in so doing reveal the truth behind them...

Myth: Being gay is a choice

THE TRUTH: A study in the 1990s found that genetic variations in a region on the X chromosome were linked to whether men were straight or gay A study from 2017 even found individual genes that may influence how sexual orientation develops in boys and men, both in the womb and during life. Although not as much research has been done about women's sexuality, these studies go to show that biology does indeed play a part in who you're attracted to

Myth: all people who are transgender need to undergo surgery to be truly the gender they identify as

wants to undergo surgery, but that
locate make here any term of make the any term of make the any term of the any terms. Surgery is a very personal moice. Some people may not want an arrange to recommend one people may not want and one people may not wan

Myth: There are only two genders - male and female

THE TAUTH: Many people get biological sex and gender confused. Biological sex is what your chromosomes dictate you are, and gender is a social construct of roles and behaviours. When someone is born, they are assigned male, female or intersex (biological characteristics of both male and female). However, as people grow and their personality and identity develops, they may feel that they are more male, more female or somewhere in between these two binaries Gender is a spectrum and people don't always fit neatly either side

Myth: Bisexual people are gay but just won't admit it

THE TRUTH: The clue is in the word bisexual - bi people are attracted to males and females! Bisexuality is a legitimate sexuality. The fact that some people may not understand that you can be attracted to both males and females doesn't mean that bisexuality doesn't exist.

Myth: Trans people are gay

THE TRUTH: Gender identity and sexuality are two separate things. Some trans people are gay, some are straight, some are bisexual, some are pansexual... you can see where this is going! Gender identity doesn't determine who you're attracted to.

Myth: If you're a crossdresser or gender queer, you want to change gender

THE TRUTH: Just because someone enjoys dressing up as the opposite sex, or dressing in a non-traditional male/female way, doesn't mean that they want to change their gender. People enjoy expressing themselves in loads of different ways, and clothing and appearance is one of them.

Myth: All gay men have anal sex

THE TRUTH: Anal sex is just on the unit activity that gay guys may engage in, but there are lots of other intimation in things you can do that aren't anality up to each person involved to decide what they want to do and what they feel comfortable doing. Some any new don't enjoy anal sex, and that's fine your sexuality doesn't need to dictate what kind of intimate activities you enjoy! Find some anal alternatives at the dicktionary.co.uk

Myth: Lesbians can't get

THE TRUTH: As a sexual health team, we come across a lot of people who mistakenly believe that you can't get a sexually transmitted infection through sex between women. You can! If you're a woman who has sex with women, you should still get a full check up between each sexual partner and take measures to prevent STI transmission with new partners. Use dental dams for oral sex and wash sex toys between each partner, or pop a condom on it.

For more information on Gaylife Stoke, visit lgbtstoke.co.uk or call 0300 123 0970.



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DON'T JUST SURVIVE, Sex coaching and Bodywork for LGBTQ people

Body Curious is a Leicester-based sex education and coaching service for LGBTQ people who feel they need a helping hand with intimacy, sex coaching and getting to know their body. Here, Beck Thom tells Midlands Zone what it's all about...

Who's behind Body Curious?

I am - Beck Thom; a Sexological Bodyworker based in Leicester.

What is Sexological Bodywork?

We're like sex therapists, except we can offer bodywork, which adds a whole 'somatic' dimension. When we do things with our bodies with attention and intention, this can be helpful in many ways in our lives, including our sexual lives.

Why work with LGBTQ people?

I work with 'anybody with a body' but understand that LGBTQ people face extra challenges around sex, intimacy, pleasure and feeling safe.

I am passionate about people having the right to experience the pleasure, sensation and satisfaction that our bodies are capable of. Lack of relevant sexual education, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, sexual abuse and trauma can all prevent us reaching our sexual potential.

Not fitting into the 'norm', I believe, offers us a valuable opportunity to explore our sexuality, and this can be very freeing too! It's great to do this in a community, which is where workshops come in

What is The Quintimacy Series?

The Quintimacy Series features three workshops about queer intimacy, conscious touch, consent, body massage and a cuddle space

The workshops fill a huge gap in our sex education, and we discover what we want and how to ask for it. This is an important aspect of sexual health that is often forgotten. One participant told me, "I'm getting more confident and in touch with my body and

boundaries. I feel relaxed, empowered, proud of myself and the other participants, and privileged to have shared the experience with others."

The Quintimacy Series ran in Leicester in the winter/spring. It will run in the Midlands this autumn and will also be held, in just one day, in Manchester, in early May.

What does Body Curious offer?

Permission to talk about sex from an LGBTQ perspective.

Sex coaching and sex education services for all women.

 Work on embodied consent and exploring what your body wants and doesn't want.

The chance to explore your sexual/gender expression, being witnessed as you are, or as you grow and transition.

- · Help with body image issues
- The chance to explore anal pleasure and health.
- The chance to get to know your body and feel more sensation following hormonal or surgical transition
- ScarWork a gentle, non invasive scar treatment for appearance, sensation and emotional aspects.
- The opportunity to address worries about use of alcohol/drugs, porn use or fantasy.
- The chance to enhance connection, communication, pleasure and intimacy between partners.

· The opportunity to learn skills for intimacy and sex; how to touch, erotic/genital/anal massage and communication.



How do we do this safely?

Certified sexological bodyworkers are professionally trained and work to a code of ethics. A session should always feature a discussion that asks, "What do you want to achieve?", as well as a learning objective.

The bodyworker is clothed and wears gloves for genital one-way touch. There are similar boundaries to those of a counsellor; confidentiality and not having relationships or sex with our clients.

What if I have queries?

I take self referrals from clients; sometimes clients who've been recommended by a counsellor or other professional.

For more about Body Curious, email bodycurious.midlands@gmail.com, visit body-curious-sexcoach.co.uk or search for 'Body Curious' on Facebook.

A Client's Story

Sam is a 32-year-old bisexual man who had tried to talk to a counsellor, but felt the counsellor was uncomfortable talking about sex. Sam wanted to work on body image, sexual confidence and shame about anal sex. He often allowed male partners to have unprotected sex with him, despite his desire to be safe, and sometimes he felt sore and depressed afterwards. He expressed anger that he didn't speak up and felt 'weak', which made his feelings of shame worse.

Sam's learning objectives were to become more confident, to find out what he liked and wanted, to communicate this and to explore anal pleasure.

After a lot of work around feeling safe and calm, Sam felt ready to try external anal massage. Done with gloves and oil, this can be both relaxing and arousing. It is a wonderful practice, done without any other agenda. We 'wake up' the whole area, increase sensitivity and pleasure, and relax muscles. No one 'pushes' into the anai opening, we wait until we are 'invited in'. For people who've suffered trauma and transgressions of their boundaries, to experience this can transform their relationship with receiving penetration. Sam felt pretty hopeless in our first sessions. He is now having more satisfying sex where he's confident to ask for what he wants, including for use of condoms and lube. He can offer skilled anal massage techniques to his partners, show them how he likes to be touched, and they have a great time waiting for the 'invitation in'l He also joked that I should be installed at the local Sexual Health clinic!



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Women's Aid & Refuge 24-hour National Domestic Violence Freephone Helpline 0808 2000 247

10 Things to Know About Consent

Consent is a big topic when it comes to having sex, and the lines can often appear blurred - especially when you've been drinking. Well, our friends at Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Partnership NHS Trust Sexual Health have put together a list of 10 things you need to know about consent...

1. Can you legally consent to sexual activity if you've been drinking?

No. The law states that a

person must have
complete freedom and
capacity to make
decisions about whether
they want to have sex or
not. If you've been drinking alcohol, you
are not deemed to have the capacity to
make those choices

2. What if you've already had sex earlier that day?

Just because you've

had sex earlier in the day, doesn't mean there's an open invitation to have sex again later that day. Each time you have sex, consent needs to be given, and people have the freedom to change their mind at any point. Consent can never be assumed from previous sexual activity

5. How much do you need to drink to be unable to consent to sex?

There's no official unit of measure, as everyone's level of tolerance to alcohol/drugs is



different. You may think you're capable of making decisions after a couple of pints, but your partner may not be, and the law doesn't see it this way. Alcohol and drugs impair your judgement (no matter the amount) and you may do things you wouldn't normally It's better being safe than sorry - if you suspect someone has been drinking or taking drugs, avoid any sexual activity.

4. What if we've been openly flirting all day/night?

Flirtatious behaviour or wearing something considered 'suggestive'

doesn't mean that
someone is giving you
consent to have sex with
them, Everyone is
entitled to wear
whatever they want as
long as they're comfortable

5. What if you have an erection?

Nope, still not consent. An erection is a physiological response; it doesn't always coincide with desire, or mean that you want to have sex with someone.



6. What if someone said no to sex when sober but yes to sex when drunk?

A drunk 'yes' isn't consent, Your best bet would be to wait until that person has sobered up and can make the decision with a clear head.



7. How about if someone just needs a bit of convincing to have sex?

Definitely not consent. You should both have the freedom to make your own choices without pressure or control. Remember, con-



control. Remember, coercing someone into sex is not consensual and is against the law

It is also illegal to give someone alcohol or drugs with the intention of having sex or sexual contact with them.

8. Isn't drunk sex okay if we're in a relationship/dating?

A person who's had alcohol or drugs doesn't have the ability to consent to any sexual activity - and this applies to everyone, including people who are dating, 'friends

with benefits' or in relationships
Sex under the influence of alcohol is
illegal - consensual sex is the aim of the
game. Some people feel aroused after
drinking; this is because alcohol can
lower their inhibitions and may make
them feel more impulsive than they
would ordinarily.

The best way to stay on the right side of the law is to wait until you're both sober and can give full consent.

9. What if we were sexting earlier?

Let's just be clear - anything you agreed to earlier that day, yesterday, two weeks before or even six months ago, does not have any bearing on the decision to

have sex right now. Valid consent can only be given just before the act, so any plans you've made previously do not commit you to anything. Remember, you can change your mind at any time, even if you're part way through sex.

10. They're carrying condoms - doesn't that mean they want sex?

Just because your partner is carrying condoms doesn't mean they're expecting to have sex. You should never feel pressured into sexual



activity just because your partner is well prepared. Any decision to have sex should be made by all of those involved.

Most importantly, remember:

For more information from Staffordshire & Stoke on Trent Partnership NHS Trust Sexual Health, visit their Tumblr page at lifestylestogether tumblr com or search for 'Lifestyles Better Together' on Facebook







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Thurs 1 - Sun 4 March



Back once again at Birmingham's Village Inn is the finest ever tribute to Dame Edna - Jonathan Hellyer's DE Experience! This is one of the most popular nights at The Village Inn, so get there early to bag yourself a good view!

Friday 2 March - The Village Inn, Birmingham

Danny Beard set to shine in Brum

Glitter god Danny Beard
makes his way back to his
Birmingham home of Eden
Bar this month, for what's set
to be another fantastic night
out. If you've not seen Danny
before, then you really are
missing out. The Britain's Got
Talent star offers amazing vocals, hilarious tales and oodles
of utterly cheeky banter

Saturday 3 March -Eden, Birmingham





Anyone for a cocktail?

You've had a great weekend partying in Brum's gay village - and then along comes Monday to bring you back down to earth with a great big bang...
But fear not, there's still fun to be had! Every Monday, The Loft runs its hugely popular Cocktail Club, serving two cocktails for just a tenner from 5pm until late. There's a massive menu to choose from too, meaning there's something for everyone to enjoy!

Every Monday - The Loft, Birmingham

Glamorous

opening night for new Coventry gay venue

There's a new gay venue coming to Coventry this month!
The folk behind the popular Glamorous bar in Brum are set to open a sister venue in Coventry, replacing what until recently was Rainbows. Opening night sees the fantastic Kara Van Park take to the stage to launch the venue in style!

Friday 2 March -Glamorous, Coventry



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What's On

Mon 5 - Sun 11 March



The Drag With No Name

at The Village Inn!

The award-winning Drag With No Name heads to Birmingham this month for an action-packed night of cabaret! Her unique comedy style pretty much guarantees you a great night out - especially with all those cheap drinks offers too!

Friday 9 March The Village Inn. Birmingham



Cupcakke comes to Brum

> Chicago rapper and viral star Cupcakke is com ing to Birmingham's Nightingale Club this month. You may have heard her songs Deepthroat and Vagina online - and if you have, you'll know you're in for a real treat! It's set to be a great night, so be sure to head along! Friday 9 March - The Nightingale, Birmingham

showbiz to Brum



La Voix is a class act, as evidenced by her semi final appearance on Britain's Got Talent If you haven't seen one of her fantastic shows yet, put that right by popping along to Eden Bar this very month.

Thursday 8 March - Eden Bar, Birmingham



Tina Sparkle visits Shrawsbury for Hayana Republic's Fabulous Mondays gay night this month The uni-filled evening is hosted by Miss. Penny, who'll be taking the party right hrough to the early hours

Monday & March Havana Republic, Shrewsbury

LaQueefa brings the party to Coventry's Yard!



Birmingham favourite LaQueefa heads a few miles down the road to The Yard in Coventry this month, She'll be on stage for a night of song, entertainment and laughs. It's always a great atmosphere at The Yard, so if you're stuck for something to do, then be sure to swing by.

Friday 9 March - The Yard, Coventry

What's On Mon 12 - Sun 18 March

celebrate St Patrick's Day with DJ Wike Emery

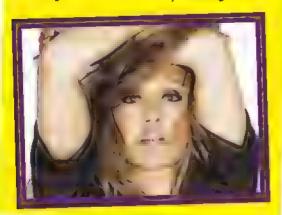
Whether you're Irish or not, it's great to celebrate St Patrick's Day! Pop along to Birmingham's award-winning Missing Bar for a night of all things Irish, as DJ Mike Emery takes to the decks for one big green party!

Saturday 17 March - Missing, Birmingham

Kelly Llorenna live in Coventry!

Now here's a throwback! This month sees vocalist Kelly Llorenna take to the stage at Coventry gay bar The Yard. The Tell It To My Heart and Heart Of Gold singer will be bringing back some great Eurodance memories from the early noughties.

Saturday 17 March - The Yard, Coventry



Coventry cabaret with Spangles Galore



There's yet another night of cabaret to enjoy at Coventry gay venue The Yard this week. This time it's with the fantastic Spangles Galore! If you haven't visited The Yard yet, then why not pop along?

Friday 16 March -The Yard, Coventry

Morrissey Disco at Eden Bar

If you're a fan of music by Morrissey, there's a whole night dedicated to it in the marquee of Birmingham's Eden Bar this month. Let's party!

Saturday 17 March -Eden, Birmingham

Friday night cabaret with Tanya Hyde



There's Friday night fun to be had at Birmingham's Village Inn. this week sees the fan tastic Tanya Hyde take to the stage for an action-packed show that's sure to have you in attones.

Get there early - it's set to be a: busy one!

Friday 16 March The Village Inn, Birmingham

Furry fun with MidsBears at Eden

If you're a bear, or a friend of the bear community at large, then pop down to MidsBears at Eden every third Friday of the month. It's a great night out and attracts a fab crowd. Check it out you'll love it!

Friday 16 March - Eden, Birmingham



Mon 19 - Sun 25 March



RuPaul's Drag Race star and Eden Bar favourite Charlie Hides returns for a night of cabaret and comedy in Birmingham's gay village. Although now internationally famous thanks to the hit TV show, Charlie still has a soft spot for her fans in Brum! She'll also be supported by the fantastic DJ Poni on the decks!

returns to Brum

Saturday 24 March - Eden, Birmingham



up for a bit of a midweek sing song? Then be sure to head along to Coventry's newest gay venue, The Yard. There, you'll be joined by Minnie & Jupiter from 8pm onwards, catering for all your karaoke needs.

There's even a free shot for every singer!

Every Thursday The Yard, Coventry





This week's Friday night cabaret at Birming ham's award winning Village Inn is drag veteran Lola Lasagne. She'll be taking to the stage on Friday 23 March for a night of fim-filled comedy and singalong magic Why not start off your weekend in style with a

Friday 23 March - The Village Inn, Birmingham

Let's get Quizzical!

great night out?

Wednesday nights at Birmingham's Eden Bar give you a chance to pit your wits against your mates in the all new Quizzical event. Hosted by DJ Poni, the quiz in volves using your smartphone to answer a few rounds of tricky questions. So if you fancy yourself as the next Egghead or Chaser, then be sure to head down to the venue and try it for yourself.

Every Wednesday - Eden, Birmingham

Sizzling Sundays with Warty!

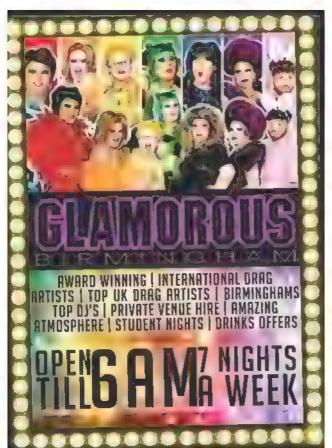


Heading for a night out in Dudley? Then head on down to Bar Dival Every Sabbath sees Miss Marty hosting her Sizzling Sundays event so expect a night of songs, entertainment, fun and games! We all know Marty loves a good party, so it's going to be a great night out on the town!

Every Sunday -Bar Diva, Dudley



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Won 26 March - Sun 1 April

JE c. bir

Baga Chipz at Coventry's The Yard!

The fabulous Baga Chipz heads to Coventry's The Yard this month for an action-packed evening of cabaret. Expect a great night out - particularly if you buy yourself a baga chipz on the way home.

Friday 50 March The Yard, Coventry



Eden's 10th birthday party!

There's double trouble at Eden Bar this month as Mary Mac and 'Dolly Parton' help celebrate the venue's 10th birthday!

It's free entry all night and there'll be music from DJ Toni Lee - so if you fancy getting involved in the festivities, pop along and enjoy the show!

Saturday 51 March - Eden, Birmingham

to The Village Inn

The Whore of Hampstead Heath returns home to Birmingham for her monthly residency at popular cabaret bar The V.llage Inn Expect all her usual games and shenanigans, making for an Litterly fun and fabulously fan tastic night out There are delicious drinks offers to enjoy too, as well as the chance to party through tin the crack of dawn Go for it!

Friday 30 March -The Village Inn, Birmingham



Viclay Jackson's back in Brum!

There's a special treat in store for you lot this Easter weekend!
The fabulous and award-winning Vicky Jackson will be taking to the stage with her fantastic tribute to Pink! Her shows are always roof-raising, so be sure to head down and 'get the party started'.
Great music, great

Great music, great drinks offers and great company - all making for a great night out

Sunday 1 April The Village Inn. Strmingham





This New Zealand folk comedy due stop off in Birmingham as part of a brand new UK and Ireland tour, their first in seven years. The pair have previously hilled themselves as formerly New Zealand's fourth most popular guitar-based digibongo acapella-rap-funk-comedy folk duo' (try saying that when you've got something else stuffed in your mouth!) Their show sees them combining witty observation, characterisation and acoustic guitar music to excellent effect Thursday 22 March, Genting Arena, Birmingham

Take a 'stroll through the countryside' at Birmingham Gay Symphony Orchestra's spring concert, where all the featured music has been inspired by the great outdoors. Expect a selection of well-known tunes that you'll likely be whistling all the way home.

St Paul's in the Jewellery Quarter, Birmingham



Saturday 17 March,

Based on the hit movie starring Reese Witherspoon, this critically acclaimed musical follows the story of college sweetheart and homecoming queen Elle Woods, a girl who just doesn't take no for an answer So when her boyfriend, Warner, announces that he's dumping her for someone more serious, Elle puts down the credit card, hits the books and heads for Harvard Law School.

X Factor finalist Lucie Jones stars as Elle. with Rita Simons (Roxy Mitchell in EastEnders) and Bill Ward (Emmerdale and Coronation Street) lending heavyweight support.

Tuesday 13 - Saturday 17 March, Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent

stage, Describing himself as a

only a quick and withy mind but also a well-neveloped talent for making the likes of Tina Turner, Shirley Bassey and Lan

a show that's rude, crude and very, very funny



onal CV in Budimental Gorgon City and Clean Bandit, not to ion globetesting advantures that have seen smash some of the world's biggest fistivate. She's of the most exciting pop stars around right now, s to eatch her at the fix old out, try to avoid getting so des serate you once to pole dance round a isimppost o side the venue in return Monday 19 March, 02 Institute Birmingham

Testosterone

The iconic movies, pop culture and pulp fiction that informs childhood and adolescence are among the inspirations for this 'bombastic show about masculinity and identity'.

The production takes as its springboard a gender transition story, bringing together an ensemble of performers from different backgrounds to present a wide

> spectrum of masculine behaviour (will that include chopping down trees and wearing the same boxers for three weeks, we wonder?)

Thursday 29 - Friday 30 March, MAC Birmingham



Toro: Beauty and the Bull

Here at Zone, we love dancing on our desks and are quite partial to big bulls too (although very few thunder through the officethey probably don't fancy the stairs), so this is a work of dance we'll definitely be looking to catch!



Issues of homophobia, colonisation and immigration are explored in a gender-questioning take on the fairytale of Beauty And The Beast. Set in a dystopian South American landscape, the show is described as 'a darkly comic and melodramatic tragedy about the monsters men create through power, fear and oppression'... Carlos Pons Guerra's critically acclaimed DeNada Dance Theatre is the company behind the production, which contains partial nudity and scenes of a sexual nature. The show is suitable for audience members aged 14-plus.

Thursday 22 & Friday 23 March, DanceXchange, Birmingham

You, Me and Him

High-powered lawyer Olivia is nearly 40 and wants a family, but her free-wheeling younger partner Alex isn't so sure that settling down is for her. It's at times like this that a broody middle-aged gal needs a big-bearded bloke named John as her next-door neighbour - and luckily for Olivia, that's exactly what she's got.

David Tennant, complete with the aforementioned big beard - that one down there, under his nose in the accompanying photo - stars with Sally Phillips and Faye Marsay in a comedy-drama about a lesbian couple at different points in their lives.

Premiere Saturday 31 March, Cineworld, Birmingham



Police Cops in Space

There's no cop like a police cop as far as we're concerned - although in truth we're not entirely sure how a police cop differs from just a cop. And anyway, isn't that tautologous (look that word up in the dictionary if you've not heard it before - well, assuming we've spelt it right in the first place, that is!)

Anyways up, 'cops', 'police', 'bizzies', 'bobbies', 'uniform wearing truncheon-wielders we'd be happy to encounter down a back pas sage late at night' - whatever you want to call them,

they're present, correct and 'in space' in this utterly zany romp from the three amigos known as The Pretend Men.

Check 'em out, If you're lucky, they may even feel your collar for you (coh err, constable!)

Wednesday 28 March, Arena Theatre, Wolverhamp-







MidlandsZone.co.uk 39

in chrant Birmingham























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Contact the Sexual Health Team at the Birmingham LGBT Centre

- blgbt.org/sexual-health
 - sexualhealth@blgbt.org
 - 0121 643 0821

- umbrellahealth.co.uk
 - 0121 237 5700
 - umbrellaatbirminghamlgbt

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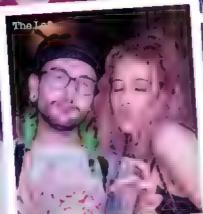






The Nightingale









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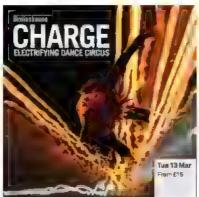


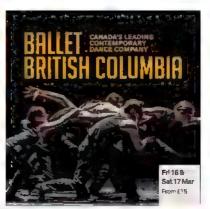


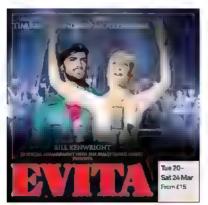
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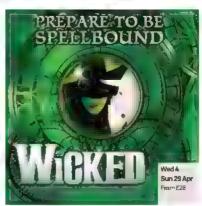


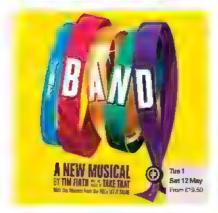




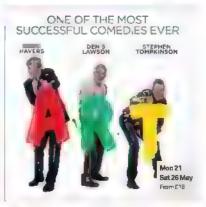


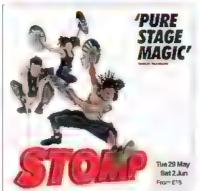


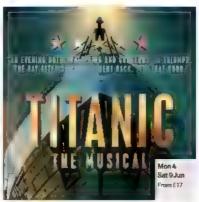










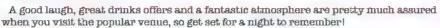


























⁶ gorgeous

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- A) 50-plus
- B) 60-plus
- C) 70-plus

PROUDO EAR IT PROUN

Competition closes on Saturday 31 March. Enter online at midlandszone.co.uk



Wonderful Women

With 2018 marking the 100th anniversary of women winning the right to vote - largely thanks to the Suffragette movement - and Thursday 8 March being International Women's Day - a day to celebrate the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women - we pay tribute to some of the Midlands' most powerful and influential gay and bisexual women (in alphabetical order, of course, because we can't pick favourites)...

Anna Richardson

Following her education in Staffordshire, Shropshire-born Anna began her TV career fronting The Big Breakfast.

Most recently, she's been the host of bizarre Channel Four dating show Naked Attraction. Richardson has been in a relationship with former Great British Bake Off host Sue Perkins since 2014



Cindy Edwards

Hailing from Shrewsbury, Cindy is the mastermind behind the UK's largest and most successful lesbian festival, L Fest. Since 2011, thousands of gay women and their

families
have been to
one of her
events - and
this year's
festival,
hosted in
Llandudno,
Wales, has
sold out six
months
before taking
place...



Elly Barnes

Elly was born in Leicestershire, and since 2010 has been using her training programme, Educate & Celebrate, to

make schools LGBT friendly She has previously taken the top spot in the Independent On Sunday's Pink List, and has also been shortlisted for a National Diversity Award.



Lucy Spraggan

The 26 year-old former X Factor and Beer Fear star. originally from Derbyshire, has been the face of the lesbian music scene for some time now, perform ing at local LGBT events such as Birmingham Pride and L Fest. Lucy has recently married partner Georgina, with whom she has foster children.



from the Midlands

Margot James

Born in Coventry,
Margot is the current
MP for Stourbridge
and is also the
Minister of State for
Digital & Culture. The
first openly lesbian
MP in the
Conservative party,
she lives in South
Kensington with her
partner, Jay Hunt,



Steph Keeble

Steph is the director of local charity Birmingham LGBT.
Hailing from Worcester, she was previously CEO of a
domestic violence charity in Gloucestershire. Working

alongside former
Birmingham
LGBT Health &
Wellbeing
Manager David
Viney, Steph was
an integral part
of Birmingham
LGBT's success in
making the
Independent On
Sunday's 2012
Pink List



Victoria Broom

Shropshire born and bred, Victoria began her acting career after attending the Junior Carlton Television workshops in Birmingham. She's best known for her roles as Fran in Different For Girls and Sascha in ITV1's Marcella. appearing alongside Anna Friel.



VG Lee

Critically acclaimed author and stand up comedian VG Lee was born in Birmingham and has written five novels, including The Woman In Beige, Diary Of A Provincial Lesbian and, most recently, Mr Oliver's Object Of Desire, She has

been nominated for a Stonewall Award for writing and won The Ultimate Planet award for Best Established Author. She's also a judge for the Polari First Book Prize.



Happy International Women's Day!

DO WE STILL NEED



In 2018, it seems things are looking rosy for the British LGBT community. We can get married, we can adopt kids, we can give blood (kind of) there isn't really much left for us to achieve in terms of equality. So do we still need to have our own exclusive places to go to on a night out? Do we still need a gay scene? Here's what Midlands Zone readers had to say...

We 100% still need LGBT safe spaces. for a number of reasons. One is because of safety and acceptance. Do you think I can go down Broad Street in a pair of heels and not get harassed? You'd be talking crazy! I went there late last year for a friend's



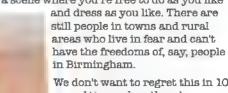
birthday - Brass House wouldn't let me in and said it was for my own good. I was wearing a jumper that said 'Queerdo' on it, Then we went to Walkabout, where the toilet attendant aggressively told me, "No funny business in here,' as I walked into a cubical!

The other reason we need them is to keep queer culture alive: drag shows, clubkids, expressive art. You won't see nights like Second Self held in a straight bar! We just need to make sure our spaces are accepting and we don't become guilty of excluding people. You don't need to sleep with the same sex to be queer.

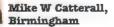
This is clearly an interesting issue if you're under 30 years of age. It seems you want full integration to the mainstream, If you're over 30, there's an understanding of just how special the gay scene is and what it stands for. It also depends on the venue as well.

I think it would be terribly sad to blend into a 'non-gay scene'. All those guys who died, went to prison, got abused and tortured so we could have our freedom, it'd be a kick in the teeth for them if we were to lose the gay scene. Without them and my generation (I'm 41), we wouldn't have any rights at all. We must NEVER forget that. Pride is good fun, but I think there has to be a point where we remember how we got here

If you live in a city like Birmingham, London or Manchester, you're blessed with a scene where you're free to do as you like



We don't want to regret this in 10 years' time, when there's nothing left of the scene we all know and love. I think we need to keep something from our very hard past.





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A GAY SCENE?



We need to stop segregating ourselves, and definitely need to involve ourselves with the rest of the world. Only then will we have respect for each other. Secluding the gay community is not the way forward. Also, I don't see the point in gay Pride anymore, apart from a weekend of partying.

Mo Ash Anser, Birmingham

I think venues should only be for those who identify as LGBT, the reason being that I've faced filthy looks for giving another man a peck on the cheek (the cheek on their facel) from straight people who're only there for the happy hour, decent music or because other pubs have closed etc... There should be more emphasis on informing straight people that they're in an LGBT venue, and that if they don't like it, they should leave...





Tom Hendy, Birmingham

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Ask this question in about 50 years' time. Right now, I wouldn't feel safe attempting to pull someone on the straight scene

Andy Ancliff

The LGBTQ* 'scene' is and always will be important and necessary. We do, however, need to make sure it evolves with the community who benefits from it.

Ceri Starkie-Roberts, Stoke-on-Trent

Yes, we do still need gay bars. We need safe places so that the community can meet, express their true identity and socialise without fear of violence or persecution. Sadly, not all straight pubs and bars are accepting of our community.

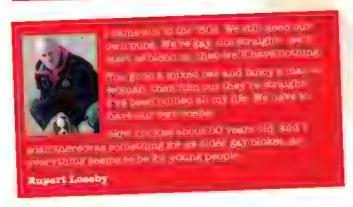






I've spent 25-plus years on the scene and experienced many changes. If I could make two suggestions, they would be: a more diverse music playlist in venues and outdoor non-smoking spaces where the environment has been considered in the design.

Patrick Coughlan, Birmingham









Further information available

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Food and drink news from across the Midlands...



Popular Lebanese restaurant chain set to open premises in Birmingham s New Street Station this month

Direction gale on fact married regard

Birmingham's first monthly vegan street food festival is now up and running

Located at Hawkery Yard in Pershore Street, at the back of the Arcadian and close to the Bullring Fish Market, the event takes place on the first Sunday of every month. Participating traders include No Baloney, Absolutely Vegan, Vegivores, Numinums, Vegan Junk and Biddulph's Pizzeria.

For more information, visit hawkeryardbirmingham.co uk





Popular burger restaurant & cocktail bar gets green light to build a rooftop bar in Worcester

Popular burger restaurant & cocktail bar Hanbao have had plans approved by the council to build a rooftop bar in Worcester city centre.

Due to open to the public towards the start of the summer, the structure will connect with the current Hanbac premises in Foregate Street and another Grade II building to the rear

Hanbao, which means hamburger in Chinese, boasts a mouthwatering menu of burgers and sides. Favourites include the Hanbao Burger (double marinated patty, sesame seeds, cheese, lettuce, spring onions, red onion, toasted sesame mayo, teriyaki glaze and kimchi paste) and the Odd Future (double patty, glazed donut, cheese, bourbon bacon jam, candied bacon, fresh chilli and baconnaise).

For more information or to book a table visit hanbao co uk

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LIFE OF A THIRTYSOMETHING GAY

Hite Stepolicai Signidia Milienini

66A goddess, her muse & Section 28 99

So it was 1998. I was 17. Still at sixth form doing my A Levels, desperately stuck in the closet.

That damn closet. So stuffy. I wanted to shout. But instead, I did the thing I knew was expected of me, and carried on quietly and nervously scanning that horizon, watching to see if anyone had spotted my secret. Of course people had. School had been tough. Going to one of the largest state LEA comprehensives in south Birmingham had hardly spared me the indignity of being called out whenever anyone felt they needed a laugh or two. Don't get me wrong, I fought back. Nevertheless, it hurt. It was tough being a closeted gay teen, and I knew something had to break before I

I agonised about coming out all that summer I'd found out that a friend of a friend had come out. I was shocked, amazed, excited and suddenly in love with this guy for saying those impossible words. I felt a sudden rush of confidence and knew what I had to do...

By the start of August, I'd come out to a friend. She wasn't my best mate; I was testing the water, I guess. She was fab, and probably more relieved that I wasn't asking her out after an awkwardly long conversation which I'd started with that self confessing dramatic opener, 'I've got something to tell you...'. We laughed, we joked, we hugged and we became even closer

Saying the words was liberating, a moment when the ground beneath my feet shifted, just like it had done four years earlier when I'd finally reconciled with myself one Sunday afternoon, as I walked home from my weekend job, that I was definitely gay. The aching attraction I felt for members of my own sex was just too strong, and had been there ever since I could remember.

So I'd done it. I'd said the words. I expected it to get easier, but it didn't. I wasn't yet brave enough to tell my closest friends; too afraid in case they rejected me. I was paranoid and full of anxiety What if they told others and gossiped behind my back? In that moment of freedom, I realised all I'd really done was

push that painfully heavy closet door ajar, but it remained far from open, I was still unable to get out.

Then enter, stage right, my politics A Level tutor. A butch, blokey woman, often in leathers, sporting short, cropped hair and a bellowing voice that was unafraid and unapologetic. She terrorised the school. She devoured and hu miliated the bullies like they had me. She took no shit from anyone. She was my goddess and I loved her... every bit of her. And then, one day in 1998, she became my salvation.

On a school trip to Amsterdam, one night in a bar, she staggered up to me half cut, when I was with friends from my class, and whispered into my ear, 'So can I ask you a question?' My heart raced. I knew what would come next, but I was terrified that she would say something too loud in front of everybody else. I nodded, painfully scanning my horizon. 'Are you one of the family?' she asked. 'Yes,' I replied, looking sheepish and full of shame. It was all I could muster 'Fuck,' came her reply, 'you and me need to talk. Let's get out of here.' And we did, pronto. She took me to my first ever gay bar, we talked for hours, she got me drunk, she made us talk to a beautiful Canadian called Ted and his girlfriend, a real Will And Grace. Ted was my first kiss. Well, let's say real kiss and decent fumble. He blew me away Everything had suddenly happened so fast. My tutor hadn't just rescued me, she'd ripped the closet door off! There was no going back, and I couldn't have been happier

Yet, as much as she was my saving grace and my protector, and me her muse, she'd taken enormous risks. Her characteristic defiance could have got her in deep water. For at that very moment when she'd staggered over to me in the bar, Section 28 was still very much in force. In 1988, 30 years ago this May, Margaret Thatcher's government passed the Local Government Act, which made clear in Section 28 that a local authority 'shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the in tention of promoting homosexuality' or 'promote the teaching in any maintained

school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship'. No teacher in England, Wales and Scotland was permitted to promote homosexuality as an acceptable way of life. There was so much ambiguity in the legislative wording, it was safer not to talk about it. It created a new fear on the back of the Aids crisis. Teachers had no choice but to tow the party line. Talking about any thing gay became a sure way to forgo your teaching career So much fear persisted through into the 1990s that teachers turned a blind eye to the gay bashing, because they didn't know how to handle it without being seen to promote homosexuality, It was a strait jacket, and one that left guys like me adrift without the hope of a supportive

My politics teacher could have been arrested, charged and sent down for reaching out to a young guy who she could see was desperately unhappy, locked away in that closest. And yet, in that moment, she defied the critics, defied the law, defied the school rules, and saved me from myself. She gave me freedom, she gave me my true self

In 2003, Section 28 was finally repealed from the statute books in England and Wales - it happened in Scotland in 2000 - but in the 15 years it remained law, many young, impressionable and vulnerable gay youth had been affected in ways that are only now becoming apparent, During 2018 there will be many exhibitions, discussions and debates about it. Definitely worth checking them out.





Keep your Friends closed

Having recently been ill (I got that flu which comes as a complete surprise to us every single winter...), I decided to make myself feel so, so much worse by doing that box set thing. TV every hour of every day until someone prised the remote control from my cold, dead hands and I started the long, slow process of relearning how to relate to people in 3D. My chosen box set was Friends, which seemingly was on repeat throughout the entirety of the 1990s. I used to like it, I watched it with my sister, and we rooted for Ross and Rachel and laughed at Joey It's not something I'm particularly proud of, but, you know, everyone was doing it. Rewatching in online box set form started out as a nice bit of nostalgia. Some of the jokes were funny and the hairstyles are a bit of a laugh. But then it occurred to me that the laughs aimed at gayness were racking up.

The idea that Chandler is too girly to be straight is a recurring theme, and every episode seems to have a lazy crack at how funny and horrible it would be if he really were gay. In fact, the jokes at the expense of gay people, trans people, fat people, female people come in thick and fast, and some of it is really uncomfortable.

And things didn't get any better in the later seasons of the show. In fact, I think some of the jokes got lazier - Chandler got fake-gayer, Joey got dumber, Monica spent more time in a flashback fat suit. But what is really uncomfortable is that I don't remember even noticing the homophobia when I first watched it all those years ago. Surely I could see that the jokes were based on lazy stereotypes? That being gay was used as something to laugh at? That being trans was depicted only as being a predatory drag queen? But I'm not sure I did.

Could it be that we have moved so far since then that lazy stereotypes like this stand out in sharp relief? Is gayness now largely treated so much better on TV and in the media that the attitudes on Friends seem desperately old fashioned? Have I got so at home in this brave new

world that I've forgotten just how pervasive homophobia (and other phobias) used to be? I hope so

Let's forget all this nostalgia about what used to be. I'm not sure the next generations need to know what we used to watch. It's just not funny anymore. And it doesn't cure the flu









Give and take

We can all agree that huge progress has been made in LGBT rights. By and large in this country we enjoy the same rights as our heterosexual counterparts and we are free to marry our partners. Same-sex marriage is now legal in 26 countries around the world and will soon become authorised in Austria and also in Taiwan, the first Asian country to do so.

So far so good. But no sooner had same-sex couples tied the knot 'down under' than the Australian Conservatives confirmed their aspiration to restore the marriage law to its original meaning. An Australian Conservatives spokesperson proclaimed that the party "supports the natural family, and wants to act as advocates for

Image: Urban Heights (2017), Hayley McNally, @ the artist.

'mum, dad and the kids".

If you think such a move is unthinkable, think again. Last month,
Bermuda, an Atlantic island home to 60,000 people, ended the right to gay marriage, replacing it with a new Domestic Partnership Act that allows gay or straight couples to form a partnership which, the Bermuda government says, carries equivalent rights.
The decision also means cruise ships registered in Bermuda are likely to be banned from hosting same-sex weddings.

Because of Bermuda's status as an overseas dependent territory, the UK government has the power to block the law-change, but even though MPs on all sides criticised the decision. For-

eign Secretary Boris Johnson has refused to do so.

Meanwhile, same-sex Bermudian couples who've been married have now been rendered an anomaly and effectively told that they aren't quite as equal as everyone else.

The implications for worldwide LGBT rights go far beyond Bermuda. If the UK government, a long-time supporter of human rights, allows this to happen in its own overseas territories, it does, in the words of Labour MP Chris Bryant, make Britain a 'laughing stock in the international human rights field". As a result, Britain may now find it harder to promote LGBT rights around the world, given that it has failed to do so in its own back yard. We may be in danger of taking for granted our hard-won rights, but let's not forget that, even today, they can just as easily be taken away again.





THE VIRAL ROUND-UP

Here's what we've been looking at online...

We all do it - spend hours on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. Often we're distracted from what we should be doing by cat videos and funny pranks - or by something feelgood that's been shared so much on the net it's officially classed as 'viral'. Well, here are some of Midlands Zone's favourites from the past month!



HOT OLYMPIANS AND CHEESY CHAT-UP LINES - TWO OF OUR FAVOURITE THINGS...

If, like us, you were hooked on the Winter Olympics in PyeongChang, then a couple of guys may have caught your eye.

The hottest felias in the USA team dropped by the Cosmopolitan offices and provided their cheesiest chat-up lines before stripping half naked. It's certainly worth the watch - we'd offer them all gold!

Check out the video on YouTube at: youtube/LGJoElM9A7w

STREEP SNAPS!

Our fave Insta pics of the legendary Meryl Streep - as our fave foods! Visit @tasteofstreep for more...

What makes Brum a great place to be LGBT?



Birmingham's Aston University has launched a fantastic video explaining why the city is such a great place to study and live if you're an LGBT person.

Featuring the vibrant gay scene as well as various other aspects of the city, it really portrays Brum as a safe and fun place for LGBT folk to be.

We're proud of you, Birmingham! Check out the video over on the Aston University Facebook page:

facebook.com/astonuniversity



Meryl's at her best when she's got a chip on her shoulder...



How do you eat yours, Meryl?



Oh look at her! She wants a pizza the action!





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